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BY

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PREFACE

The object of the author has been to state and summarise in a brief, succinct form the arguments drawn from History in opposition to the claim of the Catholic Church: that is, to the claim put forward by that Church to speak with Divine and Infallible Authority. The author insists upon the point that he is not attempting a positive apologetic drawn from History in favour of this claim, but a rebutting of the evidence drawn from History opposed to this claim. He is engaged in examining the value of the arguments drawn from History to prove that the Catholic Church has varied or erred in her teaching or has made it depend upon immoral methods, and in showing that they have no force.

The little book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the three moral arguments: (1) that the Church has made pronouncements which History can prove to be false; (2) that the Church, can be proved by History to have used material which she knew to be false; (3) that the Church, being proved by history to be not only

organised but increasingly organised from the beginning of its existence, is thereby shown to be different from the simple thing which a divine institution of the sort should be.

Secondly, the intellectual argument, to wit, that the Church can be proved by History to be man-made, not God-made. This the author divides into two sections: (1) the Protestant argument that there was some original good message told by Jesus Christ, which the Church has gradually corrupted and from the origin of which she has deviated; (2) the general agnostic argument that the Church can be proved historically to be but one of many religions, to have grown up like any other religion, with the same illusions and similar rites and mysteries, and is therefore man-made—which last form of attack the author regards as to-day by far the most serious.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

There needs but a brief introduction from the same pen as that which composed the essay which follows it.

It must be to this effect.

The general subject "The Catholic Church and History" might be treated from a hundred different positions. Perhaps the most important in the eyes of the cultured man of our day is the question whether the Catholic Church is, or is not, proved by the general story of European history for the last two thousand years to have been a beneficent influence. That question, however, I cannot touch upon because the question whether the Church be beneficent or no is, to a Catholic, subsidiary to the point whether its claim to be the very truth is valid or no. If this claim is justified, then certainly the Church must be beneficent. If it be proved beneficent, that will indeed be some support of its claim; but a weak one, because we cannot even judge whether it be beneficent or no until we have decided what we think better and what worse—and this issue cannot be decided until we are certain of our philosophy, that is, of our religion.

It is another and more important point to discuss whether the Church in her long history has, or has not, shown exceptional signs of holiness and of supernatural power, which are an evidence of her claim. There are also, as I have said, very many other points of discussion which the general title suggests.

I have confined myself to *one*, and *one* only, to wit, the rebutting of a certain argument drawn from History *against* the Church. I have done so for the reason that, in my eyes at least, much the most formidable assault delivered against the Catholic Church to-day is the assault delivered from the historical argument. There remains (as I have said in the Essay that follows) much of the old Protestant argument, to wit, that an original excellent establishment or message of divine origin was corrupted in the course of the centuries and that the Roman Communion still defends that corruption, so that its claim to authority fails. This I have attempted to meet. But of far more weight in my judgment, at the present moment, is the general argument that, regarding History as a whole and adding to it what little we can guess, and what very little we positively know, about man before

he began to establish records, the Faith is but an illusion, parallel to many another such illusion to which men have been subject by the process of projecting their own imaginations upon the void of the universe.

This I am convinced is the chief attack which we of the Faith have to meet in modern times. The modern white world, the world of the European races and their oversea expansion, is rapidly becoming divided into two fairly definite camps: those who accept the full mission of the Catholic Church and those who are convinced, by the study of geology and recorded History, that the Catholic Church is but one more example of man's power of self-delusion.

Two questions may be asked of me by those who should read the analysis which makes up my booklet. First, why have I confined myself to rebutting, that is, to a negative position, instead of advancing positive evidence from History in favor of the Catholic claim (evidence drawn from holiness, continuity, unity, etc.)? Secondly, why have I given but a portion, and not the largest portion, of my space to what I have called the most important part of the attack, to wit, the attack from

general pre-History and History, the purely Sceptical attack which I deal with at the end of my Essay? My answer to these two questions is as follows:

First, that, in my judgment, the action of the Catholic Church is here a defensive action. The opponent *takes it for granted* that History and pre-History *dis*prove the Catholic claim. He must be met as one attacking.

Secondly, that though the general Sceptical attack is by far the more important, yet it needs less space in writing for the meeting of it than does the discussion of the old Protestant attitude. The reason is that the issue between the Faith and mere scepticism is narrower and sharper, and at the same time more general. If you are debating whether the Church declined or was corrupted you must go into more historical detail. You must in some degree, even in so short an essay as this, be concrete. But on the other and larger issue you have a very simple and direct "yes" or "no"; which is, briefly, the answer to that old, eternal question "whether religion be from God or from man"; and upon the answer to that question depends the future of our civilisation.—*The Editor.*

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND HISTORY

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND HISTORY

I

1. By the term "The Church" I mean the Catholic Church; and by the Catholic Church I mean that visible society real, one, and clearly present before the world to-day, which is in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome, and accepts not only the supremacy of that see but also the Infallibility of its occupant when, as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, and speaking in that capacity, he defines a matter in faith or morals.

2. The Church claims Divine Authority. She says:

"I alone know fully and teach those truths essential to the life and final happiness of the soul. I alone am that Society wherein the human spirit reposes in its native place; for I alone stand in the centre whence all is seen in proportion and whence the chaotic perspective of things falls into right order. Mankind cannot feed upon itself—for that is death at last. I alone provide external sustenance from that which made mankind. The soil of my

country alone can fully nourish mankind. Here, in me, alone is reality. For I alone am not man-made but am of direct divine foundation and am by my divine Founder perpetually maintained."

3. Against this claim many forms of rejection are found, each with its type of argument: as, that the claim conflicts with the ascertained results of Physical Science: that it advances a particular affirmation not based on the only proofs admissible by reason: that the objector discovers in the Church not the marks of holiness which should accompany such a claim, but rather of evil, etc.

Among the chief objections is the objection from History. It is affirmed that the records of the past, the better they are known and the more closely they are examined, make the more certainly for the rejection of the Church's claim to Divine Authority, to unique inspiration. These records (it is affirmed) show the Church to be of merely human origin. They yield manifold evidence that illusion, myth and even craft have built up her structure. Her rites are of the kind imagined by men in all ages and places wherever men have abandoned themselves to emotional images divorced from reason. Her doctrines are spun out of nothingness by men

engaged upon mere systems invented to explain irrational statements. Her objects of worship are but projections of the worshipper's mind and have no real existence.

History, it is said, can prove all this. We can trace illusion growing from step to step: the mythical and legendary gradually accepted for fact; the doubtful, vague, uncertain, tentative dream hardening into fixed and absurd dogma. Supposed contemporary evidence, enlightened History with modern apparatus, proved to be subsequent interpolations. The writings traditionally ascribed to witnesses turn out—under the examination of History—to be of a very different and later date. Beyond all this and clinching the argument is the discovery through History that men have always thus created for themselves wholly fanciful beings whom they have worshipped always in much the same fashions. There has been a long process of self-deception from which humanity in its advance is gradually freeing itself, and in this process the Catholic Church is but the last phase.

It is this objection, the argument from History, that I propose to refute. Certain other of the main objections—the objection from Reason, the objec-

tion from Philosophy, the objection from Physical Science—are dealt with in other works in this series. I am dealing with the historical objection alone. I propose to show, not that History may convince any man of the Church's claim, but that the supposed argument from History against that claim has failed. I propose to enquire upon the validity of the objection from History.

II

Premises must precede such an enquiry. I lay them down as follows:

(1) The refutation of any argument against the Faith is not a demonstration of the truth of the Faith. It is the removal only of an obstacle to the Faith. For the Faith is not arrived at by demonstration, but by demonstration it is shown to be at least tenable. The Faith is not a conclusion which all can reach by the formal action of reason, but a revelation to be defended by reason. The Faith is not a theory, but a thing. It is rational, but not deductively arrived at. There is no process whereby all mankind can be convinced of it as of an abstract proposition. But there is a process whereby all mankind can be convinced that each particular proposition against it has failed.

This principle in what is called "Apologetics" (that is, writings in defence of Catholic truth) is so generally neglected that it is of the first importance to make it quite clear at the opening of any discussion upon revealed religion.

A man who can see colours will never be able to prove colour to a colour-blind man. He can show that the colour-blind man's arguments—e.g., that colours do not exist because if they did they would affect surface—are false. If he proceeds to establish the presence of colours positively, he must do so by analogy, by convergent evidence, by the manifest action of others, by the proved nature of other senses than that of sight. He can only *prove* (in the strict deductive sense of the word "prove") that the sense of colour is rational, acceptable without violence to the human mind; but that it is present he must establish by other methods.

Nearly all our modern debates in this matter are confused by the fact that one of the parties misconceives the nature of these debates. The opponent of Catholicism thinks that its apologist is, in arguing, trying to prove Catholic truth as one proves a case for a positive verdict. He is not. He is rebutting the supposed value of opposing evidence;

he is pleading for a negative verdict; for acquittal of the charge "irrational." When he comes to establishing the Faith positively, he does not do so by following one line of deductive reason, but by a mass of converging considerations.

History cannot be said to prove the Faith, save in the very extended use of the word "prove" to mean a general process of increasing conviction from the examination of what is revealed of the Church's action on the world, of men's attitude towards it, of the moral and intellectual activities of acceptors and rejectors compared. But it can be *proved* that an increasing knowledge of History does not shake the Church's claim to Divine Authority: while, on the contrary, a lesser knowledge is almost invariably more hostile to that authority than a greater.

(2) I have used the term "reason," and this leads me to my second premise: The human reason is absolute in its own sphere.

That elementary truth is often denied to-day (though the minds which deny it can only use reason to arrive at this very conclusion!), but it is fundamental and I must postulate it as a necessary prelude to any discussion. For to argue with men

who deny the basis of all argument is futile; it is like pleading in a court where the judge is a corpse and the jury a set of waxworks.

A man says, "The river Ohio flows eastwards." I show by the compass, the map, and the sun, or in any other rational way you like that it flows westward. If he then answer me, "Oh! that is formal logic—I have no use for it! Westward and eastward are but apparent contradictories. They can be resolved into a higher unity. And, after all, what is 'flowing'? And here is a bend of the river which does flow eastward for a mile or two. And a statement may well be true in a higher sense than the geographical one. And anyhow, the modern mind is no longer bound by the mediaeval fetters of dialectic"—if he replies with this sort of rigmarole, I must leave him to it. I am writing not for modernists—that is, not for people who think that a proposition can be both true and untrue at the same time—but for men of sane tradition who admit logic as a court of final appeal in things of the mind. For we Catholics regard reason as supreme in its own sphere and will admit nothing contrary to reason.

(3) Lastly, I must premise that we are discuss-

ing things as they are: the real Catholic Church; and are excluding from the discussion what is not germane to it. We are discussing the claim of the Catholic Church to authority, the claims of its accredited organs to express divine truth—not what some opponent may in ignorance regard as an accredited organ of the Catholic Church, when it is nothing of the kind, nor a supposed doctrine of the Church which the Church has never taught. Conversely, I do not admit as rebutting evidence such phrases as "all the best authorities" or "all the latest authorities"—they are worthless as evidence. I examine the grounds on which the affirmations are made, not the mere affirmation unsupported by anything but fashion. (Thus, if an opponent advance, "Marcus, a priest, said the earth was flat: it is proved round; therefore the Catholic Church was wrong," it is replied that Marcus, a priest, is not the Catholic Church. Or if it be said, "The Catholic Church teaches that mankind is but six thousand years old," it is answered, "Many heretical sects have taught this but the Catholic Church has never taught it." Or if it be said, "The Catholic Church affirms the witness of the fourth Gospel but all reasoning men admit that it is spurious," it is replied,

"All reasoning men do not admit that it is spurious: that is but the affirmation of a fashionable school.")

III

We must begin by establishing the main sections into which is divided the argument from History against the claims of the Catholic Church.

But before setting out these sections in their order I must reject one as having no relation to the discussion, though often confused with it: I mean the so-called historical argument from material prosperity.

It is advanced that the claim of the Catholic Church to Divine Authority is negatived by a proved historical process whereby societies rejecting the Church's claim are blessed with material prosperity, while societies accepting that claim become poor.

Such an argument no more applies to societies in their relation to the Church's authority than it does to individuals in relation to the authority of their own conscience or of their own reason. My conviction that a course of action is morally right, or that a given statement is intellectually true, is not to be tested by its effect upon my income. In point

of fact, the argument is as worthless in its presumptions as in its reasoning. The historical affirmation is historically false. It is not true that societies have risen in wealth through the rejection of the Catholic Faith, or fallen in wealth through the retention of it. The two phenomena are not correlated in History at all, and there is as much to be set upon the one side of the account in this brief two hundred years over which the rises and falls extend as on the other.

But even were the statement true, the application of it would be clearly beside the mark: even had every Catholic society fallen into penury and every anti-Catholic risen to affluence, it would be utterly without bearing upon the truth or falsehood of the Catholic claim.

This being said, what are the respectable and historical arguments against the Faith? What are those arguments drawn from History of which the intelligent man must take serious notice? They would seem to fall into two categories:

The first argument I will call the minor argument, because it appeals only to the moral sense—not that the moral sense is less than the intellectual, but that in weighing questions of material evidence

(which is the matter of History) a moral test takes the second place. Thus, in a court of justice evidence to character, though of weight, counts less in establishing a man's claim than material evidence. Next I find, and much more cogent, a major argument, which is directly concerned with the intellectual facilities of man.

(I) The minor, or moral argument, as I have called it, is directed against the character of the Church, and attempts to show from History that her character is not consonant with her claims. It has many forms: accusations of cruelty, of unsocial neglect in material things, etc., but the main headings are three:

(a) The Church has been historically confident upon and has affirmed as truths a number of points since proved to be erroneous: a Divine Authority would never go wrong upon any point.

(b) The Church has relied on falsehoods and propagated them *after* she had known them to be falsehoods, and has not abandoned them until she was compelled to abandon them by the overwhelming weight of evidence. No Divine Authority would act in this fashion.

(c) The Church is highly organised and has

apparently always shown organisation: such organisation has developed more and more from the beginning, or at any rate from a very early stage indeed. The Church is a body whose doctrines, institutions and structure have perpetually proceeded from the simpler to the more complex and from the less to the more defined. Nothing possessing divine inspiration would be organised, for organisation is mechanical and is of death: inspiration, which is of life, remains free, at large, untrammelled by rule.

(II) What I have called the major, intellectual argument, which is much the more serious in all our debate, stands thus:

The Church is man-made, as can be seen by the appearance over and over again in History of a doctrine or a practice unknown to an earlier epoch, and more largely, by a comparison between all religions; for the Church, which seemed a unique phenomenon to the lesser historical knowledge of our fathers, is now discovered to be but one of many similar phenomena, one of many religions, with rites and doctrines not indeed identical (they differ widely), but all having parts in common and all presumably of human institution. Therefore

the Church must be included in the character of all religions: it is but one of many and man-made like the rest.

But this major, intellectual argument falls into two very distinct branches, which I will call the Protestant and the purely Sceptical.

(a) The Protestant appeal to History takes the form of saying: "The Christian revelation is indeed divine, but at some period (earlier or later, according to the views of the disputant) it was corrupted by man-made accretions and illusions. History is therefore opposed to the Catholic Church: for History bears witness to the fact that the Catholic Church as we know it is essentially man-made. But there does underlie it some divine foundation, some moral revelation not man-made." (The limits of this acceptable minimum each individual disputant fixes for himself.)

(b) The Sceptical appeal to History—much the most formidable to-day, and always intellectually the most respectable—speaks in much bolder tones, thus: "The whole of the Catholic Faith from beginning to end is man-made. It is a mass of illusions: of projections of the human mind thrown by the human imagination upon the void; of decep-

tions, some of them conscious in some degree, many more but half-conscious; by far the most unconscious, implanted in the mind by early training. What the Catholic Church affirms is false from beginning to end, and History shows that the affirmations of the Catholic Faith have been thus man-made step by step from the very first origins we can discover. The idea of a God is man-made; so is the sacramental idea, the idea of Incarnation—the whole affair.

Such, as it seems to me, are the historical arguments against the claim of the Catholic Church to Divine Authority. Those arguments, tabulated in the order of their importance, that is, of the power they wield over a rational human mind fully open to evidence and to approaches of reason, I will here set down in graphic form:

I propose therefore to deal with them in their order, beginning with the least and going on to the greatest.

IV

(I) The Minor or Moral Argument

(a) *That the Church has been historically wrong upon a number of facts: a Divine Authority would not go wrong in this fashion.*

History shows the Catholic claim to Divine Authority to be false, by:

I. The *Minor* or Moral Argument from History against the Catholic claim to Divine Authority. — which says that

- (a) The Catholic Church has taught things later proved erroneous — which no Divine Authority would do.
- (b) The Catholic Church has taught things erroneous after she knew them to be erroneous — which no Divine Authority would do.
- (c) The Catholic Church is highly and increasingly organised — which no Divinely Authorised body would be.

II. The *Major* or Intellectual argument from History against the Catholic claim to Divine Authority. — which says that

- (a) (Protestant) The Catholic Church can be historically proved a mass of man-made accretions upon an original basis morally true.
- (b) (Sceptical or Pagan) The Catholic Church can be historically proved to be *wholly* man-made in *all* its structure.

We begin by defining what we mean by the words "the Church," or that body of pronouncement by the Church which we call "the Faith."

Manifestly, a corporate authority is not responsible for pronouncements on which it has allowed divergence: manifestly, again, such an authority is not responsible for pronouncements on which it has allowed change without protest. Manifestly, it is not responsible for pronouncements made not by itself through its admitted organs of universal affirmation, but by certain of its body acting as individuals or even as parts.

I use the word "manifestly." This may seem too strong a term in the ears of those who have heard precisely these false arguments repeated so often that the statement of their falsity sounds novel and strange.

But if we examine the propositions closely, we shall see that this word "manifestly" exactly and inevitably applies in the three cases.

A particular body makes the awful claim to Divine Authority and Infallibility. That claim may be false, and even ridiculous: but "manifestly" it could not at the same time make the claim and make an absolutely contradictory claim. For the

word "body" substitute the word "man"; let us suppose a particular man to come forward and say, "I have Divine Authority to teach. On matters essential to ultimate human happiness I can give replies which are infallibly true." If such a man were asked, "What do you think the weather will be to-morrow?" or "What was the date of the Battle of Hastings?" and he were to answer, "The weather may be this or that," or "I cannot tell you when the Battle of Hastings was fought, but I seem to remember that it was on such and such a date," he is not, when making such replies, acting within the framework of his tremendous claim. If you say, "A man making such a claim ought never to speak at all upon any subject save as an infallible authority," you are pre-supposing non-human conditions. There is no sort of reason why such a man should not admit his doubts or his ignorance in things not pertinent to his authority. There is not even any reason why he should not say with regard to a particular proposition, "You ask my definition in this matter: so far I have not defined it; but I warn you that when I do define it I shall claim my reply to be infallible." If he so answer, then the hypotheses he may be examining in the interval

may be numerous and even contradictory one to the other without their divergence affecting his claim.

Tested by this very simple (and I think, conclusive) parallel, the historical argument drawn from historical error attributable to the Church fails. *If any man can give a particular instance in which a specific affirmation has been made by those organs of affirmation which the Church solemnly defines as hers, and can say what error, historically proved, has since attached to such an affirmation then he shall be met.* But no man has brought forward such a case.

What such affirmation is to be found? The history is a long one; it extends over nearly two thousand years. It is not difficult at all, rather it is singularly easy and definite to say in any period, "Here was the Church, these were its accredited organs of expression, and this was a solemn affirmation of the Church, not of any individual or of any part." For instance, you can read the acts of the first Council of Ephesus; it was œcumenical; it acted overtly under Papal authority. Can you give a point therein defined which has been proved since to be historically erroneous? or in the Council of

Trent? or of the Fourth Lateran? or of the Vatican? or of Nicæa? In which of them have you an affirmation which History has disproved? There is none. The more you contemplate that extraordinary historical phenomenon the more you will be astonished by it. But I do not advance it as a proof of the Church's divine claim. I am here only concerned with the negative argument. There has not been in point of fact any official affirmation proceeding from the accredited organs of the Catholic Church—not one—from the beginning to the present day, which has received historical disproof.

Here it may be objected that such affirmations, solemnly pronounced as the final decision of the Church, concern matters which are not of their nature susceptible of historical disproof; they concern such matters as the immortality of the soul, the personality of the Godhead, its triune quality, the Incarnation, etc. In other words, since the Church has not touched on historical matters but only on metaphysical, she has preserved herself from attack upon those lines.

In point of fact, the argument is not strictly conclusive, for there are exceptional points—for instance, the Resurrection—in which the Church

might very well have been challenged by clear, overwhelming, multiple, historical proof—and it has not been so challenged. But take the contention for what it is (and in the main it is true) that the Church, not having dealt with History but with transcendental truth, has thus escaped historical error. It at least disposes of the *historical* argument against the Faith in that particular. We must under this particular head—a minor one I admit—accept the fact that the Faith has not proposed through its authoritative organs in any of its definitions of dogma something which *History* has disproved.

But what of divergence, and what of change?

As to divergence, the answer to me seems simple and brief. Where divergence is admitted, and so long as it is admitted, infallible pronouncement is neither claimed nor can be at work. The divergence is openly between the judgments or affirmations of individuals or of sections. If the Church, having definitely pronounced by the voice of her head and of any of the great councils with which he has been in communion and which have acted with his authority—the Council of Nicæa, for instance—something which in a later age the same authoritative organs had to deny in the face of new his-

torical evidence, then there would be a fundamental divergence and an historical argument against the claim to Divine Authority. I repeat, as I shall continue to repeat throughout this brief essay, the essential point that the argument is negative. I am not affirming here, and for the moment, that such consistency is proof of the divinity of the claim—though it is certainly very remarkable; I am only pointing out that the consistency *is* present throughout History. You may say, if you will, that it is present because even a human corporation claiming infallibility would take great care never to contradict itself. Granted (though I think it would have its work cut out)! But at least it must be admitted that the consistency is there, and that, therefore, an historical argument drawn from inconsistency does not lie.

Now what of the more formidable argument drawn from change? It is not to be doubted as an historical truth that in one era the general mood of Christians with regard to a particular point lay in one direction, in another era, in another. It is probable, for instance, that the early Church expected the Second Advent in a more or less brief period. It is certain that many holy men, perhaps

repeating the mood of their time, thought, in an earlier age, of the state of the dead as one of sleep awaiting the Resurrection, with no definition of the Particular Judgment, and so forth. In one period one devotion prevails; in another, another. One great doctrine is emphasised in one era; another in a later era.

Here, then, is change.

To which I answer that the change is never—has never been in any particular instance which any historian can find and point out—a change of doctrine. There has never been a definition, never a pronouncement, by any organ of the Church, saying "This or that is so," of which such changes of mood have later compelled a retraction.

Had we, for instance, in the early documents of the Church, a solemn, definite Apostolic statement that Our Lord would come back to earth in glory before the destruction of Jerusalem: had we any trace or echo of a protest raised by some who, disappointed in the delay of their hopes, laid their disappointment to the Apostles: had we any echo of voices in the Apostolic or sub-Apostolic period saying, "Since He has not come again we are deceived by the Church"—then the particular case i

have mentioned (and it is only one out of a great number) would be arguable. But we have none such.

Had we a solemn pronouncement registered, as of the Faith, that the dead lay unliving and out of communion with us or with life as a whole from the moment of their passing to the Resurrection of the Flesh, then the statement that this was a contradiction with later defined doctrine on the Particular Judgment and with our prayers for the dead, would be arguable. But there has been no such pronouncement.

In other words, change, in the sense of change of vague mood, has no more historical weight in this department than the admitted divergence between individuals or sections upon matters undefined.

Before authority has spoken, authority has not committed itself. When authority has spoken, contradiction must be established between itself and itself: or there is no historical argument against the claim of authority. You may say that there is no such argument only because authority is careful not to contradict itself. Well and good; but it remains true that the contradiction has not taken place, and that therefore the historical argument

based upon it fails. When or if it shall apparently take place, there will be time to meet such an argument in its apparent strength. But so far—and the period, remember, is one far longer than that attached to any other defined human institution—the argument does not apply.

Now, though it is not logically connected with the strict process of reason I am here developing, may I not ask the reader rhetorically once more whether that is not in his eyes a very singular phenomenon?

Here is an organised corporation, a strict society, which has admittedly existed continuously for this prodigious length of time, through extreme vicissitudes of knowledge and of ignorance, through the most violent revolutions of human mood: a society which sprang up in the brilliant light of Pagan antiquity and of the half-divine Greek power of thought, and in the open majesty of the Empire, which persisted through the darkest periods of our material ignorance, which lived on through phases of gross popular credulity and equally gross alternate phases of popular scepticism; which has been bathed in the enthusiasm of the twelfth century, has gloried in the moral splendours of the thir-

teenth, has struggled through the filth of our modern time; has suffered the splendid temptations of the Renaissance; has next found itself struggling with the base madnesses of Puritan assaults. Through such endless variety of circumstance it has remained consistent throughout that long, long term of centuries; centuries filled with every conceivable reaction of the human mind, with gusts of enthusiasm blowing from every point, each in exact contradiction to some other earlier one. Through all these the institution which is historically the oldest and the most permanent of political human things cannot be discovered affected to change in any of its final pronouncements by these human changes. It cannot be discovered in a contradiction.

That such a phenomenom—wholly unique in the story of mankind—should be of human origin is logically possible. It involves no contradiction in terms. An unbroken tradition of rigid caution, coupled with an unceasing consultation of record, might conceivably produce such consistency by human agency alone and as the result of human calculation. But the least we can say is that such an effect would be different from anything we know of men and of their actions.

(b) *That the Church has maintained error after knowing it to be error: that it has lied.*

The second charge under this head is that the Church has not only made, in good faith, errors which she has had to retract, but has actually relied on falsehood when she knew it to be falsehood and particularly in the case of errors originally committed in good faith, but continued with the deliberate intention to deceive. No Divine Authority would do that.

Now the value of such assertions—and they are frequently made—may be tested *a fortiori,* by taking the two principal classical examples upon which our opponents especially rely. It would be impossible to go over the whole category of these assertions, for they touch innumerable points. But since they all have in common one similar misunderstanding, it will suffice to examine two with perhaps a brief allusion to another.

These two chief examples I take to be the Donation of Constantine and the eternal Galileo case.

Though in each case the wrongful assertion against the Faith is based on the same fundamental misunderstanding, yet each exemplifies one of the two separate chief types of that misunderstanding.

The accusation in connection with the Donation of Constantine exemplifies the supposed deliberate use of forgery by the Church: the Galileo case exemplifies her supposed tenacity in demonstrated error—an authority claiming infallibility and reluctant to admit that it has been clearly proved fallible.

Let us see how these two test cases come out of a close examination.

It is asserted in the case of the Donation of Constantine that this document was a forgery: that on that forgery was based a particular doctrine, to wit, the supremacy of the see of Peter: that when it was proved a falsehood the Church continued to defend it, and that, since her spokesmen were compelled at last to abandon it, with it there fell the necessary prop of the Papal contention.

The Donation of Constantine is a document purporting to be a grant by the Emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester, his contemporary, of civil jurisdiction over the town of Rome; of temporal sovereignty over certain adjacent districts in Central Italy; of sundry ritual dignities in dress and public office; of the Lateran Palace for a residence in perpetuity; and with all this the recognition of the

spiritual jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome over the universal Church.

It first appeared about the time when the French Monarchy was supporting the Pope against his enemies and particularly against Byzantium, and when that monarchy was preparing the way for being declared the Empire of the West. It contains episodes which in a critical age would clearly stamp it as unauthentic. There is a ridiculous story of a dragon, for instance, which lived in a cave under the Capitol. The Emperor Constantine is represented as receiving baptism from the hands of St. Sylvester before he moved his capital to Byzantium; whereas we now know that he did not receive baptism till long after, and then not from the Pope, but from an Eastern Bishop. It represents the Emperor as being cured by baptism of leprosy—a disease which he certainly never had—and as making the donation out of gratitude.

The whole thing is manifestly mythical and legendary. But how does that false character affect the claim of the Church to infallibility in doctrine?

To answer that question we must begin by granting all those points, both doubtful and actually false, which our opponents advance as historical

fact; for we shall see that even with the fullest admission of their imaginary facts, that case has not a leg to stand upon.

They tell us that the document was a forgery (that is, a falsehood) produced with deliberate intent to support a novel claim upon the part of the Papacy. It is in fact nothing of the sort. It is a conglomeration of legend, arisen for the most part in Syria, the growth of which can be traced through the centuries. The weight of evidence would show that it was accepted as true, not first in Rome, but in Northern France—the policy of whose monarch it exactly suited. It was first quoted, not in Rome, but in Rheims. It was not brought in to support the Papal claims even in temporal sovereignty, let alone in spiritual jurisdiction, till long after even the temporal claims had been universally admitted throughout the West, and the spiritual jurisdiction, of course, for centuries. Though not authentic, it does contain an important substratum of truth. It is pretty evident that the Pope obtained increased jurisdiction in Rome after the transfer of Imperial authority to the East. It is virtually certain that the Lateran Palace became his official residence about the same time, and though we have not sufficient

record of the steps whereby the Papal Government gradually came to administrate the Roman district in the place of the Byzantine Government, which had less and less real power there (especially after the Iconoclastic quarrel), yet we do know that such jurisdiction was exercised long before we find any mention of the Donation.

But, I repeat, for the purpose of my argument it is better to grant to our opponents not only what is doubtful, but what is certainly false in their supposed facts. Granted that the Donation was a forgery, that it had for its evil purpose the artificial support of novel temporal powers in the see of Rome, and even of confirming the ancient and universally admitted spiritual supremacy: what then? How would such historical facts, if they were true (which they are not), militate against Catholic doctrine? Catholic doctrine in the matter may be very simply stated. You will find it expressed everywhere by all competent authorities over a prodigious lapse of time in words almost identical; for it is as clear as it is brief. That doctrine is as follows:

Our Lord constituted the Apostolic College. Of that College he gave Peter the Primacy. This

Primacy by divine constitution successively attached to the sees which Peter founded, first at Jerusalem, then at Antioch, finally at Rome. Its power lies not in the fact that Rome was the capital of the ancient world, but in the fact that St. Peter chose it for his final see. This Primacy of the see of Rome is superior to, and more universal than, its patriarchate of the West.

Now against that doctrine historical argument must show that Primacy was not recognised until the Donation, if the Donation be the argument in force.

There are many other historical arguments, of course, brought to bear against the original Primacy of Rome; but I am examining the very strong example of the Donation as a test case. Take any one of the innumerable textbooks in which the fixed and accredited doctrine is laid down, and examine the chain of evidence, not indeed as to the divine institution of the Papacy (for that is a matter of faith, not of History), but as to the original Primacy of Rome, as admitted by Christians, which is a matter of History, not of faith.

The chain reaches down to the very beginnings of our society. One of our most formidable op-

ponents[1] puts what he calls the "first step in Papal aggression" as early as St. Clement—that is, within a lifetime of the Crucifixion. Others may propose later dates; but no one with a pretence to elementary historical knowledge would postpone it to the ninth century, when the Donation of Constantine (in its present form) appeared. All Church history is full of Roman Primacy from the moment when Church history becomes open to detailed examination. It is implied in the procedure of the earliest councils; it is openly alluded to in act after act, as the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries proceed. If you would call it a corruption, you must put the origin of that corruption very early; indeed, you will be compelled to put it within the lifetime of those who had talked familiarly with the Apostles and knew their mind and all the tradition of the very beginnings of the Church. The Donation of Constantine was no more the foundation of this Primacy of Rome than the Revolution of 1688 was the foundation of the House of Lords in England, or than Lincoln's Presidential pronouncements during the Civil War were the foundation of the Presidency of the United States.

[1] The Anglican authority and scholar, Dr. Lightfoot.

But may it not be said that those who spoke for the Church as historians claimed the Donation to be authentic long after it had been questioned? Undoubtedly they did. And it would have been astonishing, or rather incredible, if they had not, for everybody then thought the Donation genuine. *But no doctrine was based on it.* In the same way everybody, Catholic and non-Catholic, accepts the ecclesiastical history of the Venerable Bede as genuine, and we use it in support of the connection between the English Church and Rome. But if it were proved a forgery to-morrow, the thesis of union between the English Church and Rome would remain. But they did not claim it after it had been definitely proved to be legendary; and the very fact that they officially admitted their error and confirmed their admission in final fashion is an excellent example of the difference between fallibility as expressed in doctrinal falsehood and the misapprehension of historical fact. It is an excellent example of a universal truth present throughout all the history of the Church, that the Church brings reason to bear upon every problem, and regards reason in its own sphere as absolute.

The first criticisms of the Donation are of the

fifteenth century, coming from Peacock, Bishop of Chichester, and Valla in Italy. They make no pretence to being heretical; they have no connection with any effort to destroy the unity of the Church; they are not particularly convincing—especially the latter.[1] What exploded the Donation of Constantine as an historical document was a much longer process of examination and criticism, which does not reach its final conclusions till the seventeenth century. During that process you will find many who, after the breakdown of unity in the sixteenth century, were frankly enemies of the Church from without, not historical critics from within, using the unauthenticity of the Donation as a weapon for attacking the whole Catholic scheme; but I doubt if you will find one case of a believer who regarded the gradual establishment of the truth as in any way shaking the doctrine of Papal supremacy. Yet you have plenty of critics within the Catholic Church examining the problem in full liberty, and permitted to come to a right decision upon it. You have to-day, and you will have throughout the centuries to come, an indefinitely large body of men

[1] For instance, he says there cannot have been a dragon under the Capitol because dragons are only found in Africa!

with the fullest historical confidence, great scholars and experts in this particular point, who are fully convinced of the legendary character of the Donation, and yet to whose minds it is inconceivable (as I confess it is to mine) that anyone should think the establishment of that historical detail a cause for doubt in the plain and most ancient doctrine of Roman supremacy with which it was for some six centuries out of twenty adventitiously connected.

Now for the Galileo case. It is so continually quoted, it is so much the accepted type of such things, that I might be tempted to go into it at greater length; on the contrary, I shall deal with it more briefly, because the points at issue are as restricted as they are evident, and the complete misunderstanding upon which the accusation is based may be exposed by the most elementary statement of it.

The accusation runs thus: "Galileo, having discovered by indubitable physical proof the motion of the earth, was condemned by the Catholic Church for stating the same, and her condemnation remained in force until the nineteenth century, when she was compelled to allow the matter to lapse."

That assertion, the commonest made in all this

department of historical attack upon the Faith, contains two elementary and decisive historical errors. First, the error that Galileo was condemned for teaching a then novel particular doctrine which he proved true; secondly, the error that Galileo was condemned by authority of the the Catholic Church upon a point of doctrine: that is, that the Catholic Church affirmed in the seventeenth century by her Infallible Authority as a point in doctrine that the earth did not move.

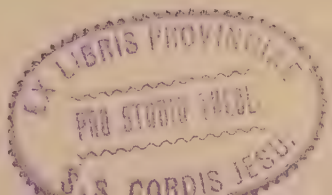
In point of fact, Galileo's condemnation did not turn upon his teaching a demonstrated truth, for it was not yet demonstrated. It did not turn upon a novel idea in Astronomy, but upon an hypothesis which was already hoary before Galileo was born; and the condemnation was not originated against the idea as an hypothesis, but against the teaching of it as an established fact. So much for point *one*.

Next, as to point *two*, the condemnation did not proceed from the Catholic Church. It proceeded from a particular disciplinary organ of the Catholic Church, with no authority whatsoever for finally establishing a point in doctrine. To confuse it with Catholic definition of doctrine would be like confusing the definition of a New York court of justice

with an amendment to the Constitution. The Pope himself, as it happened, forbade what would have been a grave error—though not one binding the Church—I mean, a full definition of heresy by the inquisitors upon the matter. But all that is neither here nor there. There was no definition binding upon Christians, and has been none, nor ever will be in such a purely mechanical affair. What there *was* was disciplinary action against a man who had done everything he could to provoke the constituted authorities of religion by querulous and bitter insult (he was a difficult character), a man who was unable to support his own statements in court (nothing he brought forward at his trial came near to being conclusive on the motion of the earth, and much that he brought forward was fantastic),[1] and the action came at the end of an upheaval in which, by exactly this kind of irrational, angry attitude in graver matters, the unity of Christendom had been destroyed. No wonder the authorities had grown touchy. Moreover, as anyone may see who reads

[1] For instance, the absurdity about the tides, and the argument from the phases of Venus.

1849



the trial (and as Huxley saw), Galileo could not prove his case. It was still only an hypothesis.

The theory that the earth was not fixed, but turning on its axis and moving round the sun, had not only been familiar (as I have said) to educated[1] Europe from long before Galileo was born, but had been taught with clerical approval *as an hypothesis* in Catholic universities; it was taught again in such universities not long after the Galileo trial as evidence accumulated, and became a commonplace of all teaching in Catholic schools and colleges long before the expunging of the Galilean treatise from the Index—always, and necessarily, a lengthy process.

The whole attack on the Church in connection with Galileo turns upon these two misunderstandings, of which the first is unessential, but the second capital: First, that a proved scientific fact was at issue; secondly, that this proved scientific fact was denied, because it was novel, and was denied by that authority which alone throughout the centuries had been held competent to establish points

[1] "Educated" Europe meant a far larger body in Catholic times than it does now. Universities were then popular institutions and their attendance was from every class.

of doctrine, the Papacy and the councils of the Church over which it spiritually presides. The first is wrong and the second is wrong. The Copernican theory was not novel in Galileo's time; it was still only a theory. His condemnation accuses him of returning to the *oldest* conception (Pythagorean). He was not condemned by the Church, and the instance of his condemnation, such as it was, by the appointed committee, was his persistence in teaching as a proved fact what was still only hypothesis.

Before leaving this overemphasised historical detail, I would like to make clear to the modern reader what our modern confused habit of mind often fails to grasp: the difference between teaching a thing as demonstrated fact and teaching it as hypothesis, coupled with the difference between teaching demonstrated fact and teaching metaphysical or doctrinal conclusions supposedly, but erroneously, dependent upon that fact.

For that purpose I will choose a debate familiar to all our contemporaries: the discussion on the origins of the human body.

In the last eighty years a very large and increasing body of evidence has been accumulated which points to the probability of the human body's

having come out of some original sub-human type, a sort of cousin to (though not descended from) the greater anthropoids of our own day.

It may be so. There is nothing in such an hypothesis against any Catholic doctrine. On the other hand, it is not proved. Still less is it proved that the process was of an inevitable sort unconnected with divine Creative Will. Least of all is it proved—and indeed, it cannot be proved, for the thing is manifestly contradictory to our senses—that man as we know him is not a fixed type, utterly different in quality from the beasts.

Now this hypothesis is almost universally stated to-day as a demonstrated fact—which as yet it most certainly is not; indeed, the guesses at the process continue to change year by year, as anyone can see for himself by looking up the common manuals of forty, thirty, twenty and ten years ago.

Further, there is quite commonly tacked on to it a second statement, that the so-called demonstrated fact disproves a cardinal Catholic doctrine, to wit, the Fall of Man.

Now then, supposing a professor avowedly subject to the Catholic discipline, professing in a Catholic society, were to teach (1) that the descent of

the human body was what the last of our many successive guesses presumes it to be, and were to teach that as now certain and indubitable fact, comparable to the fact of the rotundity of the earth; (2) that this origin of the human body destroyed the Catholic doctrine of Original Sin. That professor would be condemned exactly as Galileo was condemned. He would be condemned not because the Church desired to assert that the human body was *not* of such hypothetical origin, but because he had taught as certain what was uncertain; and he would be condemned upon the infinitely more important second point (which plain reason is sufficient to establish) that even if the hypothesis were already established by indubitable proof, it could not affect in any way the dogma of the Fall of Man: they are on different planes and concerned with totally different subjects.

The doctrine of the Fall of Man is a transcendental doctrine. It affirms that man in his completed nature was intended for a supernatural state, that his free-will rebelled against the will of God and that on this account his nature is *fallen* from a supernatural to a natural condition. To such a doctrine the discovery—if ever it should be made—

as to *how* the body came to be is utterly indifferent. If I say, "Young Smith was right enough till he took to drinking," it is no answer to tell me that Young Smith was once a baby who could not take to any evil, that he gradually grew up, and the whole process was one of increase and maturing, a "progress," and that *therefore* Young Smith *can't* have taken to drink. That "can't" is nonsensical. The process of becoming full grown is no bar to a moral fall.

So much for the second of the moral arguments drawn from History. Let me turn to the third: That the Church cannot be divine because it is highly organised, with defined dogmas, a hierarchy, a whole machinery of rites and laws, whereas a divinely inspired thing would remain free and simple.

(c) *That the Church is organised, therefore not of divine character.*

This last or third point made against the Church is one which haunts the greater part of modern minds with singular persistence. It is odd that it should do so; because, of all historical objections made to the Church, this is the least reasonable. But it is characteristic of the day in which we live

that emotion should take the place of reason and a certain emotional bias towards an indefinite enthusiasm (as in music) is a modern disease.

The objection is that the Church is organised, whereas whatever is of divine authority on earth must (so it is presumed) be of a vague, inspirational sort without organisation or framework—loose, attaching to the heart and imagination rather than to the intelligence. Such is the premise—and it is an enormity.

For let it be supposed that there be upon earth one particular defined Divine Authority—such is the Church's claim—how would it necessarily act and be? What would of necessity be its structure?

The reply is no *positive* argument in favour of that claim, but it is a conclusive *negative* argument in proof of the contention that *if* such a claim be true, then organisation and, as time proceeded, more and more minute and detailed organisation, would be an absolutely inevitable condition of action by such an authority.

For consider carefully what the implications of such an authority are?

Here we are on earth, possessed of certain general instincts of right and wrong—instincts commonly

proceeding to very warped effects in action. We are surrounded by an infinity of varying circumstances; our lives are brief; our power of intercommunication between individual minds is limited. Granted that there be some *Corpus*—some definable get-at-able person, place, or thing—from which absolute conclusions may be accepted; then that thing must be in the form of a society or otherwise it could not be continuous: it could not survive among ephemeral beings; it must have rules, or it could not bind beings imperfectly communicating; it must have habits, for it must be a living organism. Societies cannot live without differentiation of function and definition thereof; separation of one activity from another; subordination in command; laws more and more defined; known symbols; ritual. If anything were designed to act as an institution with divine authority among men—there might be no such design nor any such institution—but, I say, *supposing* there be such, then whatever was to act in this fashion must be a society, for it must be continuous; must be corporate, in order to overcome the imperfect connection between individual minds; must tend to more and more complete definition in its character and being as time proceeds:

for otherwise it would not have a human framework consonant to the human world for which it would be designed.

Leave men in doubt as to who is and who is not a member of such a society; let it be uncertain by what tests membership may be recognised, acquired or lost, and the whole character and personality of the divinely appointed Thing disappears: with personality disappears the faculty of diction, of affirmation, for which (by definition) it was conceived. And, indeed, so you find the Church from its origins: sacraments at once appearing, communion and excommunion, doctrine more and more defined as the generations pass and doubts or controversies arise, ritual embryonically present at its very outset and rapidly stabilised; from the beginning you have it certainly hierarchic, disciplined, bound in a strict framework; and still more certainly (if that be possible) it shows limitation or outline, a frontier, a boundary—whereby any man may test who is within and who is without the Church.

And if this be true of structure, it is still more obviously true of doctrine. Granted that there be such a society with a claim to infallible pronouncement upon the things essential to the satisfaction of

the human soul, how can it proceed save by exact definition of its pronouncements?

Begin with the vague and general, though perhaps intense, conviction that the soul survives death. Regard it not as a product of affection or of habit. Accept the mere intuition. What then? Does it survive as a person or not? The thing is debatable. If it does not survive as a person, what connection is there between its survival and good or evil conduct in this life? If it does survive as a person, how can such survival hold of our personality, which, being human, is manifestly of this changeable and material world?

If it be said that no answer can be given to these questions, then we deny the existence of such an authority as I here presume. I do not say that these questions and the replies to them are a proof of the truth of such authority. I say that on the hypothesis that such an authority is to be found on earth, then necessarily it must of its very nature *define* doctrine upon such matters as these, pronouncement upon which is its whole reason for being.

As each controversy of importance arises some new definition will necessarily be demanded of the

authority. Therefore, though doctrine itself does not grow—for it concerns truths outside time—definition of doctrine will grow. The time in which we live has so largely lost the habit of clear thought that I must here admit a digression in order to emphasise and put in the sharpest light the difference between the growth of *doctrine* and the growth of *definition*.

Whenever a new definition is given by the Church —e.g., the definition of Infallibility in 1870, the definition of Transubstantiation in 1215—confused thinkers, or men who have not read the proceedings, will assert that a new doctrine has been invented. A little attention to what passes at the time of such definitions should be enough to set them right. The whole debate turns upon the proof that the doctrine was present from the beginning and that innovation lies in the denial of it. The definition is a new thing to meet a new attack upon an ancient truth. The truth is aboriginal. Definition no more makes new doctrine than does a new treatise on geometry make new mathematical truth. Such matters are expounded and elucidated in increasing volume; they are not invented. So it is with the Faith.

From this, turn to another consequence of this objection to *organisation* in the Church: the objection that its machinery and instruments of action are continually unworthy, base, insufficient, affected by worldly motives, and that therefore the claim of the Church to be divine fails.

That the Church being organised and being human will suffer from defects inherent to all organisation and to all humanity is equally certain. There will be bad administrators, wicked men in holy charges, abuse of powers. But that is no answer to the claim of the Church. For consider—what is the alternative?

Supposing there be upon earth a definite body of some kind—corporation, society, officer, what you will: a definable existent *Thing* whereto men may turn for ultimate and certain pronouncements upon the chief matters of their concern (that is, the nature of man and his destiny). If that Thing, whatever form it were to be given, were *not* organised, then must affirmation clash with affirmation and whatever were common to all would divide into a mere vague mood.

Now such a mood does not fulfill the requirements of the *Thing* in question. You may indeed

say (the vast majority of English-speaking people are saying it to-day) that true religion is of this vague kind; an instinctive aspiration to unity with the Divine Will; most would even put it lower still and say "to unity with nature or the universe." They therefore feel that all attempts to systematise this aspiration, to regulate the enthusiasm, to define particular dates and cases, to set up the machinery of a society with laws, officials and decision, is a warping of the only true living and direct religious impulse: and certainly if that original and vague religious impulse in man be the only true religion and if its value be in proportion to its vagueness, then organisation is a warping and a lessening of it.

But remember that in making this statement you are denying at the outset the possibility of an authority and therefore contradicting the very affirmation you make of some certain common truth in religion. For any authority beyond mere individual emotion (which changes in each individual and varies indefinitely among many individuals) must have a power of definition, must act with a function, and therefore must be organised in some degree.

The choice is unavoidable between organisation

in that which can speak with authority and the rejection of all claim to authority—which is the rejection of all common or general certitude on matters not immediately and universally apparent. In plain words, either you must admit organisation in your religion or say that no religion is true.

I would like to make this argument quite clear, because the great majority of our contemporaries, at least in the English-speaking world, fail to make acquaintance with it. I do not say organisation proves the truth of the contention that the Church in particular is divine. I say that *if* there be such a thing as a divine Church on earth, that Church will be increasingly organised as the ages proceed, will perpetually define and re-define, will establish strict tests and will maintain its vitality by excluding what is not consonant to its nature; it will operate through differentiation of function as does every other living thing. It will have a multitudinous co-ordination of detail in proportion to the exaltation of its status, for only thus can it be alive with the supremely conscious life of the highest organisms.

I say again, this is not an argument to the effect that organisation is a witness to divinity in the

Church. It is an argument to the effect that *if* divinity speaks through any society, *then* the oracle of truth will present all the phenomena of organisation; and so far from these phenomena clashing with the religious instinct, they alone can give that instinct its full working value.

In other words, you admit or you deny a Church. If you deny it, there is no certain source of truth present amid mankind; for the religious emotion of each man changes perpetually, and the emotions of each among so many millions differ from those of his neighbour. But if there be a Church, then organisation must necessarily be the very test of its reality, as it is the test of all the higher forms of life we know.

When, therefore, we Catholics meet, as we do daily and in a thousand forms, such objections as: "If this dogma were true, it would be universally apparent"; "If that doctrine were part of the universal truth, it would not be arrived at by special conclaves of particular men fulfilling highly defined functions and even dressed in a peculiar manner of their own"; "This elaborate definition of the Real Presence jars with true devotion to the Eucharist, which is a thing of the heart and a mystery beyond

analysis," and so forth, in a myriad different forms of objection, we reply: "If, of mysteries such as the Eucharist or the continued life of man after death, or of the more familiar mysteries of personality, of time, of eternity, we have no definitions, then falsehood can be present and received as truth. There is indeed no need to define, so long as all are implicitly agreed; but the moment one says (of the Eucharist, for instance), 'There is a Presence here but it is spiritual only; the bread remains,' then must, of necessity, the claimer to infallible truth (unless she is to nullify her own claim) lay down whether that proposition be true or not: whether the bread remains, or does not remain, after consecration. Otherwise two members of a society existing to teach true doctrine will, on a fundamental and essential doctrine, be holding two contrary views, one of which at least must be false."

It would be easy to point to any number of other cases of more interest to the average modern man than the case of the Eucharist, in which he has lost all communion; for instance, to the mystery of immortality, and the discipline rather than the doctrine of our attitude towards the dead. Two members of this society claiming infallibility are faced

with the practice of necromancy, the calling up of the dead (a favourite pastime of our day among the wealthy). The one feels in the strongest fashion that in this exercise he is upon the confines of positive evil. He smells the Pit. The other is convinced that it is indeed the blessed dead who visit him and with whom he is in communion.

Which is right? The infallible authority cannot abdicate in such a crux without denying its own claim. There is no reconciliation of such a contradiction: it is Hell or Heaven. It must define and it does define; and we know on which side its definition lies. Necromancy—or Spiritualism as its modern name goes—is of Hell.

In general, then, the moral arguments against the Church as drawn from History—that is, from the record of its action—fail from one of two causes: either they misconceive the nature of the Church (*what* it is that speaks with Infallible Authority; *on what* it has spoken with Infallible Authority), or they are confused as to the implications of religion, not perceiving that, if you are to admit any criterion of truth other than that of common experience, you must admit external authority; and that, once you admit an external

authority in the final and all important questions, you admit a Church.

Such considerations do not establish the claim of the Catholic Church, but they destroy certain particular objections to that claim, drawn from the supposed clash between the moral character of the Church's claim and the historical record of the Church making such a claim.

From these I turn to what I have called the major objection of modern times: the intellectual objection; the objection that History shows the structure of the Catholic Church to have proceeded from man.

II. The Major or Intellectual Argument

The last and much the most important division of the arguments based upon History against the Catholic claim is, in general, the argument that the Church cannot be the divine thing it claims to be because it is in its essence demonstrably man-made: it is in its essence, and can be proved by History to be, of human institution, betraying all those characteristic illusions which man conjures up and imposes upon himself in all his efforts to reach out to the unknowable and unattainable of his desire.

This—by far the most serious historical form of

attack upon the Faith—falls into two distinct branches, which I will call for the sake of brevity (without pretence to the full accuracy of the terms and certainly with no intention of using them abusively) the *Protestant* and the *Pagan*. I mean by the *Protestant* argument that argument against the Faith drawn from History which maintains that the Church has suffered fundamental corruption and has lost some presupposed original character through the increasing delusions of the human mind. I call the *Pagan* or purely Sceptical argument that which denies, on the testimony of History, that there ever has been a divine Church at all, or any clear revelation of divine things to men at any time or in however simple a form, and proposes to prove that all the doctrine of the Church is of man's own making.

These two I will take successively, maintaining the order I have throughout, to wit, attending to the least important before approaching the more important.

I take it that in the times in which we live the Protestant objection, even in its vaguest form, is the less formidable. I shall take it first. I shall conclude with what is, in my own judgment, far the

most formidable attack at this moment, and likely to become still more formidable in the near future, the Pagan or purely Sceptical attack: the argument from History that *all* religion is man-made, that the Catholic Church must be included in the category of man-made things, and that therefore the Catholic Church has no claim to Divine Authority.

(a) *The Protestant argument from History.*

Throughout the story of the Catholic Church, i.e. during all the last nineteen hundred years,[1] there have continued recurrent protests against this or that doctrine: recurrent affirmations that some other doctrine, contrary to the authoritative definition, is true, and that the authoritative definition is itself false. From these denials and affirmations have proceeded what are called, in Catholic terminology, the various heresies.

But towards the end of the Middle Ages these protests gathered together in a new form, which was essentially an appeal to History, and to their general character was applied the term "Protestant." We need not quarrel over the term or its derivation. It has been, by universal agreement, applied during the last four hundred years.

[1] Taking the date of Pentecost as A. D. 29.

The Protestant challenge to the Catholic Faith is essentially a challenge based upon History. It proposes to show by historical evidence that whereas there was some original body of true revelation, this has been distorted, corrupted and overlaid, and that the Catholic Church with its perpetual accretions of doctrine, ritual and office is more and more divergent from, or even contrary to, the divine original thus presupposed.

The Protestant argument still exists even when it is put in its most vague and tenuous modern form. Even those who say, as do so many to-day (believing themselves to be pure sceptics), "I accept the mission of Jesus Christ as salutary to mankind and as containing eternal verities, which it is essential that man for his good should know; but I reject all supernatural statements in connection with this mission," are still essentially Protestants.[1] They

[1] Thus, a man who says, "While rejecting all dogmas and creed I revere the vaguer part of the traditional moral teaching of Jesus" is essentially a Protestant, not a sceptic, or Pagan: for such do not revere any part of our morals. Protestant also, not Pagan, is the man who confines himself to "the authentic teaching of Jesus" freed from all later stories of the marvellous and all the sophistries of Theology, which "authentic teaching" he picks out of the heap by his own infallibility. For the true sceptic or Pagan has no more use for the "authentic" fragments than for all the rest. He is equally indifferent to the whole.

presuppose some original nucleus, however restricted on content and in time, which they postulate as good and true.

The most extreme case—and to-day the most common one—the case of the man who says he takes the four canonical Gospels, and these alone; that he rejects Pauline theology as a corruption, a man-made thing proceeding from the man Paul; that he rejects in the Gospels themselves every element which affirms or implies the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ, His claim to divinity, His Resurrection and the rest, is still a Protestant case. He affirms that the Sermon on the Mount (to which he is oddly attached) and sundry general propositions upon humility, charity and other Catholic virtues, are good: and in saying that they are good he is saying that they are true. His quarrel is not with the whole Catholic scheme, but with everything in the Catholic scheme beyond what he has chosen for himself out of the mass of Catholic teaching.[1]

Now let us put down at the beginning of the debate one common element upon which all should be agreed: there *has* been development; and in so

[1] Heresy = Αἵρεσις—"Picking and choosing."

far as development involves change, there has been in that sense, and in that alone, change. What is more, the development continues, and in so far as the word "change" may be applied to development, change continues.[1]

The definitions of the Council of Trent are immensely more elaborate than the Apostles' Creed; the Apostles' Creed (probably dating from the earliest origins of the Church though it does, and at the latest, in its essentials, a second-century Roman form) has more exact definition in it than the Gospel; the ritual of the Mass is not identical in every place; it is not identical through time. The Liturgy at once expanded and crystallised as the generations proceeded. Even within the brief space of a few centuries it is possible to point to portions of the Roman Mass (to take but one form) which began as voluntary or optional prayers and which became incorporated in the regular structure of the Sacrifice. One might even say that certain slight

[1] Thus we say of a man of twenty-five that he "changes" into the man of forty. We also say of a man gone mad that he has "changed." But the word "change" has two very different meanings in the two cases. In the one case it is change within the framework, of unity, of one character and personality. In the other it is the change *against* that unity, a rupture of it.

additions of quite recent origin may, in the near future, follow the same course. The bishop, the priest and the deacon of the original Church formed a far simpler body than does the vast organisation of the Hierarchy to-day, and new special worships of this saint or that, new shrines, and all the rest continually arise. The argument in no way turns upon either side (for men of intelligence or information) on so obvious and elementary a truth as that such development exists. It is common ground upon which both must proceed. Where they differ is upon the point whether or no such development has introduced a fundamental change of character into the Catholic Church with the passage of the centuries.

A parallel will explain what I mean. Two men observe a tree. One says, "It is an oak, in full vigour"; the other says, "No, it was of oaken origin, but there has been grafted upon it another growth and the whole is thus not only warped and transformed, but in my eyes diseased. It is not an oak."

The first man, who says, "It is a living oak consonant in all its parts," does not deny that the acorn is different from the mature tree: the young sapling different in form from either the original

acorn or the tree as it now appears. He does not deny that in a hundred years the form of the tree will seem to have changed still more; that in the fifty years past it has changed. What he denies is that there has been any change in that by which an oak is an oak. It is essentially the thing which it has always been. That is his contention. Its growth is normal to its nature, and in so far as growth involves change, such change is the very proof of identity.

His opponent denies this. He says it was an oak once, long ago, but other plants grafted on it have so changed its nature that it can be called an oak no longer.

The appeal of the one is not to a supposed dead mechanical rigidity; it is not an affirmation that he has before him an acorn rather than an oak; it is to that principle of one-ness by which any thing is what it is. The appeal of his opponent is not to the mere fact of change (at least he must be very unintelligent if that process destroy in his eyes all essential unity in the developing thing); it is rather to the proposition that the changes were of a disfiguring and (to borrow a foreign word) "denaturing" kind. The one says, "Here is the same original

organism, in full health and strength, growing and vigorous before our eyes." The other says, "These changes, which I can substantiate by the consultation of old pictures and written records of the thing, are a proof of disease and of corruption."

It is therefore quite beside the mark for the opponents, upon historical grounds, of some particular institution essential to the Catholic Church—for instance, the Primacy of Peter—to prove by elaborate reference to record that the Papal power under St. Clement was embryonic compared with the Papal power under Innocent III. It is quite beside the mark to bring forward, at too much pains, evidence on, say, the doctrine of the Real Presence to prove that its definition in the Council of Trent is far more elaborate, exclusive and exact than the statement of it in Justin Martyr, fourteen hundred years earlier. The point is that the one party to the controversy regards such change—if you like to call it change—as an inevitable and salutary phenomenon of life and a very proof of unity in character and time: the other, as a phenomenon opposed to the true life of the thing and a proof of its loss of identity with its original principle of life.

Now in my view there are two tests which one may apply to what I have called the Protestant argument from History: two tests by which one may discover that it rings false. And these I would tabulate as follows:

(1) The test of Innovation.

(2) The test of Critical Date.

By the test of Innovation I mean an historical examination to discover whether orthodox doctrine —not points doubtful or still controversial within the Catholic body, but defined truth—as propounded by the Catholic Church upon any given matter, at any given moment, had the character of an innovation, contrasting in essence with the development of the past; or whether on the contrary it was the denial of such doctrine, the counter-affirmation provoking such definition, which bore this character of innovation and novelty. If the first view be the true one, then the Catholic Church, false or true, has at least been in all its life one personality consistent with its own essence, and the successive definitions have all been in the line of tradition. But if the opposing view be established, then indeed corruption and error and therefore the

absence of her Infallible Authority have been proved.

As to what I have called the test of Critical Date, I mean (what should be surely an obvious truth) that if the story has been a process of warping and corruption, there should be some discoverable stage at which this deflection began, and if the fixing of this stage be not only doubtful, but disputed in a hundred forms and set at widely separated epochs, differing by centuries, then the objection is ill-founded.

I would not be so pedantic and at the same time so logically weak as to demand of my opponent the fixing of a particular instant in which he discovers error originating. All such things, whether true developments or corruptions, take place in time; none springs up apparent in a single moment. All grow. But I do say that if a plain historical phenomenon of corruption has taken place in this or that—for example, the doctrine of the Eucharist—its inception must be observable within at least a certain range of years, a generation at the most. Such is the test of Critical Date.

I will now examine the matter by both these tests: Innovation and Critical Date.

(1) As to the first test, it is historically true—and once again, a very strange thing—that in every single case it is the protest against orthodoxy which has had the character of an innovation, and never the orthodox affirmation which has appeared as a novelty.

I will explain in a moment how an attempt might be made by our opponents to get over even this difficulty; but at any rate, as far as plain History is concerned, that remarkable fact which I have just stated is true.

You may take the whole list, from Cerinthus, who was a contemporary of the Apostles, down to Brigham Young and his Mormons, or to the latest Modernist, and you find in every case without exception the test working true. The heresiarch (as we Catholics call him) or the reformer, or prophet, or whatever other flattering term you may like to use in contra-distinction to heresiarch, appears as an innovator to the generation whom he disturbs, or to which he appeals. His doctrine comes as a *new* doctrine, with all the shock and also all the appeal of novelty. There is not any one case in the long story of the Church where we can trace a steady protest against *any* one of her fundamental

doctrines, a protest appearing at the origins and increasing as the doctrine is more and more clearly defined. Nor is there any one case of a definition of orthodox doctrine appearing suddenly and with all the effect of an innovation. No doubt each reformer makes the claim that he has rediscovered the old original truth, long overlaid, but my point is that, when he and his doctrine appear, it is *they* —not the things they oppose—which invariably appear as sharp and, to most men, offensive novelties.

I have called that phenomenon in the story of the Catholic Church remarkable; it is even startling. I know of no other society to which this aspect of reform or re-action applies. If you will consider for a moment the psychology of the affair, judging it by your personal knowledge of the way in which your own mind works, and the minds of the men about you, you will, I think, perceive its unique character.

After all, what happens in our minds with regard to any form of degradation? For instance, what happens to-day with regard to a misquotation in literature or a warping of function in politics?

The first misquotation takes place, and is chal-

lenged. The bad habit grows, but it is still challenged here and there: the challenge is maintained. Each time it is challenged the error is admitted, but unfortunately spreads. Sometimes there comes at the end of the process a violent re-action; literary men swarm together (as it were) and insist upon the misquotation being driven out; and sometimes they succeed.

Or again, as to the warping of a political institution. Representative institutions were founded to be representative. People soon find out that they are only imperfectly representative: that they tend to represent the avarice or vanity of the individual delegates much more than the mandate of those who sent them to the representative assembly. What happens? Immediate protest; repeated protest; attempts at reform. Sometimes the reform makes good, the fear of God is put into the politicians, and the representative institution is purged and brought up with a round turn, and compelled to do its duty.

You may take the whole range of human action in this respect, and you will invariably find a process of this kind. It is common sense. Men do not allow their conception of a thing to be deflected

by falsehood or laziness or illusion without sharply re-acting against that deflection. All History is full of the corruption of institutions—and of men; but all History is most emphatically *not full*—in fact, in all History you will not find an example—of the corruption taking place without its being noted and resisted.

Now here, in the case of Catholic doctrine, you have the singular fact that the process is the other way about. There is no protest till after the doctrine has become fixed. Take the case of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Whether true or false, it is certainly present before Cerinthus. The man who most violently combats Cerinthus' statement that Our Lord suffered as man and not as God is one of our Lord's own companions, St. John—a witness who had known Our Lord on earth, which Cerinthus never had. That is no proof that the doctrine is true; but it is proof of the historic fact that Apostolic society believed in the doctrine and that the first heresy in the matter was an innovation.

Or take the doctrine of the Eucharist. For centuries the Real Presence was accepted; in general terms, it is true, but accepted none the less. You get it unmistakably from the Words of Institution

right on for a thousand years. You can argue against the *intention* of the early statements based upon the words of institution. You can say that those who first alluded to the Eucharist did not intend the full doctrine of later times. You can say that the Words of Institution in the Gospel were only used by Our Founder metaphorically. You may say that the famous description of the Mass in Justin Martyr nearly eighteen hundred years ago did not connote the exact doctrine of Transubstantiation. You may quote (as Cranmer did) passages from St. Augustine which permit the special pleader to use them (if he leaves out the context and refuses to mention other passages) as evidence of a subjective rather than an objective Presence. But the plain historical fact remains that there is not one single protest heard during all the centuries during which the Christian Church did take the Real Presence for granted, and built up round that accepted doctrine the whole mass of the Liturgy in East and West. It remains true that you can find no resistance against this universal attitude. Though there is metaphysical discussion, there is not a case of a man saying, "The original doctrine was not that of

Real Presence: such doctrine is a corruption only just introduced, and I protest against it."

When the protest comes it is after thirty generations, at the end of the Dark Ages; and it produces a violent effect of innovation, of novelty.

I submit that no matter what particular defined doctrine in the Catholic scheme you may select, you will find without exception this most notable character attaching to it, that when denial of it was made within the Christian community—as when Arius denied the consubstantiality of the Son, or as when Nestorius denied the divine motherhood of Our Lady—it had the effect of a stone thrown at a pane of glass and breaking it: the startling effect of a shock; of something quite unexpected and exceedingly and unpleasantly new.

I myself who am writing this did, when I was a young man and very imperfectly instructed, take for granted the opposite. I thought, for instance, that the doctrine of the Trinity had very slowly arisen, that an original ignorance of Our Lord's full divinity was gradually dispelled by the development of the doctrine; that the earlier the evidence was, the less it would confirm the doctrine; and that Arius was fighting a sort of rear-guard action:

defending a cause which had once been vigorous but was lapsing through the process of time. I thought that; and I fancy most ordinary educated men who have not had the leisure or desire to read the evidence in detail think something of that sort with regard to the story of almost any one of the Christian mysteries. For, after all, the process is exactly what one would expect. One would expect any original statement in human affairs to be commonplace and straightforward, and the supernatural interpretation of it to come in by a process of accretion and illusion such as creates the innumerable legends and myths of mankind: first the teacher is a revered men, then vaguely thought to have something in him of the divine, then to be some sort of divine being, and, lastly, a God.

It was when I came to read the evidence and look closely into the matter for myself that I began to feel the surprise which I record here and which any one of my readers will also feel if he will read the actual evidence instead of guessing at what sounds most probable. The evidence is clear that the Trinitarian doctrine, growing in definition, was never put forward with novel and protested accre-

tions. It was the Arian challenge which was new and immediately resisted.

It is the same with the mystery of the sacrament. Let anyone who believes the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist to have grown up very gradually as a sort of legend or myth, an accretion overlaying some originally straightforward and in no way mysterious ceremony, read the words in which the earliest writers who refer to the matter at all speak of it. Let him not only read the way in which they speak of it, but the way in which they acted. When that young boy in the streets of Pagan Rome allowed himself to be killed rather than show to the profane What he carried veiled in his hands, it is evident that he did not think it common bread. When we find in all the very earliest evidence of Liturgy insistence upon and repetition of the mystery, it gives us to think. I say again, for the twentieth time, as I have said at so many other points in this debate, all this is not a proof of the truth of the doctrine, but it is a proof that the historical process with regard to the doctrine is not that of corruption and essential change which our opponents have presumed it to be. It is a proof that, true or false, the mystery of the sacra-

ment now held was originally held, and that the attack upon this doctrine, as upon any other, came as a novelty.

I have said that even this phenomenon, unparalleled as it is in the tale of human thought, was capable of explanation by an opponent. But I think if we examine that explanation we shall find it to fail.

The explanation is as follows: You are dealing with a body of fervid believers. As time proceeds the excesses, the delusions, the vagaries, proceeding from their very enthusiasm, permeate their body insensibly, and it is only when the process has gone a considerable length that, with a shock, some strong and lucid brain confronts the deluded with reality. Hence (it is said) the novelty of each heresy and the startling effect produced by the first statement of each heretical proposition. This is certainly true of abuses, as for instance the abuse of image worship, when it came to such a pitch that men accepted without question a mass of images, supposed to have appeared in some miraculous fashion without human workmanship. And if it be true of abuses which are recognised to be abuses by all, why should it not be true of fundamental

doctrines, considering the blind fervour of which I have spoken and the natural consequences of such fervour?

My answer to that explanation is that the cases are not sufficiently numerous to establish a rule. It is true that you do get some few cases, very few, of abuses which proceed some way before they are abolished. But they do not go on long without being pulled up, nor are they so general and manifold as to militate against our judgment that, almost in proportion to its importance, the doctrine or mystery, when it is challenged, is challenged by a new force.

Moreover, there is this consideration. In the few cases where there is the analogy of an admitted abuse somewhat tardily reformed, all in the Church ultimately accept the reform. But this is not at all the case with regard to the main orthodox doctrine —quite the other way.

In every historical case of abuse, whether it be the erroneous acceptation of a false document (as in the case of the Donation) or an abuse of excess, as in the case of the exaggeration of image worship, the traditional forces of this Sacred Society admit the moral or clerical error, and usually they begin

to admit it in increasing numbers from the moment of the first challenge. But in the case of orthodox doctrine it is not so. It is just the contrary. It is the doctrine that stands and the heresy which gradually dies out.

Of specific heresies which have attempted to maintain but a part of truth while rejecting the rest, all without exception have gone through a process of rapid growth, culmination and decay, and nearly all have at last wholly faded. That is not true, of course, of pure scepticism. That we shall always have with us, for it is native to the human mind. A complete denial of the whole Catholic scheme, that is, a complete rejection of all that is unfamiliar and does not repose upon evident proof immediately acceptable to everyone; a denial of all mystery and especially of specific doctrinal affirmation, is as natural to man as breathing, for faith is of grace and is exceptional to Nature. But the heresies, as distinguished from such general rationalist denial, never have in them the vitality which continues to urge orthodox tradition.

That is historical fact; and it is an historical fact which should give every man who is seriously examining these things grave food for thought.

Take the example which is most familiar to the older members of the present generation in English-speaking countries other than Ireland: I mean, the attitude towards Holy Writ.

Here heresy began by setting up the literal interpretation of Scripture (and the personal judgment of the reader upon it) in opposition to the authority of the Catholic Church. The Catholic tradition in the matter was that (1) Scripture was the Word of God; but (2) given us not as a record of science, or even History, so much as a witness to the Church and particularly to the Incarnation; and (3) was only to be accepted in the sense which the authority of the Catholic Church admitted.

As against that ancient Catholic attitude towards the Bible came, as a novelty, the fierce affirmation of its absolute and literal authority and of its being plainly interpretable for himself by every reader.

We are all witnesses to what has happened in that particular example.

The heresy, after nearly three hundred years of vigour, has gone to pieces. The Bible outside the Catholic Church has lost authority. The original Catholic position remains. Indeed, there is a comic irony in noting that it is we Catholics to-day who

are thought old-fashioned in maintaining our respect for the text of Scripture and in being slow to admit all the modern guess-work in derogation of it. So much for the test of Innovation.

(2) I turn to the second test, the test of Critical Date.

If it be true that the Catholic Church is the warping and corruption of an originally delivered truth, then that warping and corruption must have had an origin.

I am walking by night along a road which is laid out upon the map for miles due east and west; but after so walking for some time I begin to notice by the stars that the road is bending. It turns more and more southward. The map has misled me. In such a case I can, when daylight returns, retrace my steps and I shall find the point of flexion. I may not be able to establish it to a yard, nor even, if the process be at first very gradual, to a quarter of a mile; but I shall at least be able to say, "Up to this point it was dead straight, pointing west. After this point (say, as much as a mile further on) it is clearly bending south of west, and I find it bending more and more southward as I proceed."

If not a point at least a section of flexion can be established.

Now there is this remarkable historical fact about the process of the Catholic Church—that its Protestant opponents, all agreeing in its loss of direction, cannot agree as to when that loss began. There is not and apparently cannot be any general conclusion upon so simple an historical matter as to even the main historical section—first century, second, third, fourth, eleventh—in which this point of flexion lies. For one body of Protestant thought it is found in what they call "Counter-Reformation" of the sixteenth century. It was then that the Catholic Church went wrong, with its exaggeration of Papal power, of Eucharistic ritual, its more mechanical organisation of the Sacrament of Penance, and all the rest of it. In the fifteenth century the Church of England, of France, of Castille were all (rightly) in communion and their common authority was sound. By 1600 it was lost. For another set of Protestants the change was the opening of the Middle Ages—what is called the "Hildebrandine Movement" of 1050–85. Until then Christendom was proceeding in consonance with its tradition. The see of Peter had Primacy indeed,

but had not developed a highly detailed jurisdiction over a vast number of personal and national affairs. The discipline of celibacy among the clergy in the West (so they tell us) had been optional; its universal enforcement was a corruption. The monastic institution had been free and sincere; it slowly became, after that date, enslaved to the Papal power and to Mammon, and was more and more a scandal of insincerity. Others would find the point of departure in the ignorance and loss of material powers which mark the entry into the Dark Ages. The fifth and sixth centuries are the wide sections in which to seek the point of flexion and of decline. Others are willing to accept as traditional and on the right line the Christendom of Gregory the Great and St. Augustine of England; but the ninth century is a breaking point and the tenth a final collapse; by the time of Marozia the Church had clearly lost an original character which it never recovered, and that new and degraded thing, the mediaeval Church, had begun to appear. The Church was never more the same. For some few of my own acquaintance the dreadful moment is 1870; the right way was lost with the definition of the Infallibility of the Pope. For others again it

is the thirteenth century, with its developing organisation for the repression of heresy and its too strict definition of the sacrament. For a very great body of men in the immediate past (now a smaller number) things began to go wrong with the freedom of the Church under Constantine. Then did lay and state corruptions, imitations or influences of the old Pagan society, begin to thwart the divine scheme.

The most popular of the latest Protestant theories is that the thing went wrong almost at once between Pentecost and the predication of St. Paul, and that St. Paul was the author of the evil transformation into a mystery religion of what had before been an ethical society upon the suburban model. As their phrase goes, "Nothing can bridge the gulf between the Gospels and the Pauline writings." A lifetime ago the point of flexion was put later. In the Protestant thesis of the mid-Victorian day the corruption began about the end of the second century. St. Paul was accepted, but already there was trouble beginning, as revealed in the authentic epistles of St. Ignatius; and manifestly things were becoming Catholic (and therefore corrupt) by the time of the African Martyrs, and were

hopeless by the time of the Thirty Tyrants. For these scholars the Catholic taint is the natural accompaniment of the decline of civilisation after the Antonines.

Now I am not saying that because there is dispute upon the moment of flexion in any directive scheme, because there are debate and diverse opinion upon the point where an upright original began to go wrong, that therefore one may conclude it never did go wrong. But I am free to maintain that such enormous disparities of opinion, and such a ceaseless shifting of it, would be impossible if a plain historical process were at work.

When we consider, for instance, the popular monarchy of the English, that is, the government of England by a king, aided indeed by other powers, but having in his own hand the main force of the executive, there may be some debate as to the moment in which these powers began to fall off, until they reach the purely symbolic or nominal situation in which they are to-day, when the king no longer governs at all but is the neutral chief of society. I myself should put it as early as the reign of Edward VI, and I should say it had become marked under the elder Cecil at the beginning of Elizabeth's

reign. It is more usual to say that the great change came under Charles I, and certainly it was clinched by the civil wars. There are even perhaps some who maintain that monarchy was still in the main more powerful than any other political factor until the Dutch invasion of 1688. But at any rate it lies within these two lifetimes—1550 to 1690. No one will deny that the process had begun in the latter half of the sixteenth century; no one will deny that it was thoroughly accomplished before the end of the seventeenth.

It is so with all other historical phenomena of the kind. You can put within the limits of a lifetime, and not a very long lifetime, the transformation and decline of the Roman Empire during the third century. You can see clearly that feudalism was a living social system under Henry III of England and even under Edward I, but that it was no longer the spiritual motive of society after the Black Death. You may take any process you like throughout History, and you will find this to be true; not that you can always put your finger upon a particular year or event, let alone a particular moment, but that you can say, "Within this comparatively narrow limit of time the change takes

place, certainly the institution was living within its traditions and in the direction determined by its originals as late as such and such a moment; certainly after such and such a moment, not long subsequent, it is as clearly failing to keep that original direction."

But here, in the case of the Catholic Church, her opponents can say nothing of the kind. If they could, not only would scholarship be roughly agreed among our opponents as to the Critical Date, but we ourselves should at last be agreed, as we are agreed with regard to attack upon abuses, in the long run—though never with regard to the attack on doctrine.

But there is no such agreement, and can be none; for the simple reason that the Catholic Church has not thus warped or veered but has remained herself. So by this second test I conclude that the historical objection is false.

It seems to me that an impersonal observer, say some historical student from the extreme Orient, to whom the whole Catholic scheme was indifferent and who cared nothing whether the original institution of the Catholic Church had failed (because he had no affection for that institution and no belief

in any of its doctrines nor any respect for Jesus Christ nor any attachment to the idea even of a personal God)—it seems to me, I say, that such a wholly neutral observer would, upon the general historical evidence, decide that the Catholic Church was founded with a certain directive nineteen hundred years ago, to be correct, about the year 29, and had remained throughout the successive centuries consonant with itself. I think he would say of it what we cay say with regard to many an ancient state, "Its personality has survived, its soul is still the same, its essential unity has not been lost." He would add the qualification "yet"; he would conclude, "The personality *yet* survives; the continuous life has not *yet* been lost." We of the Faith of course affirm—but not upon historical evidence—that the word *yet* does not apply; that it shall remain to the consummation of the ages. But for the purposes of the particular argument which I am here examining, that is neither here nor here. I say that a mere historical examination with no reference to the truth or falsehood of the Church's claim will conclude that that claim has been continuous from the beginning, and that the Thing to-day is essentially what it was when the strict

organisation, the unique phenomenon, appeared in Syria under the principate of Tiberius. There is nothing left contemporary with that still vigorous, still well-favoured, ancient Thing. It has seen the disappearance of everything in Europe save itself, and its spring still copiously flows.

(b) *The Sceptical or Pagan objection from History.*

I have said that much the most important form of historical attack upon the Catholic position, the most formidable, and to-day the most hardly pressed, the most lively and the most universal, is the Pagan or purely Sceptical, the definition of which I will here repeat.

It is maintained that the claim of the Catholic Church to Divine Infallible Authority is baseless, because it is manifestly man-made. The process of reasoning is as follows:

Man is to be discovered in history perpetually making gods, erecting religious themes, constructing cosmogonies. It is in his nature thus to project himself upon the universe and to take his imaginations for realities. His gods are but large reflected images of himself; his religious doctrines, from the petty myths of a small savage tribe to the majestic

fabric of Catholicism, are one and all upon the same model. Each is false, for each differs from the rest; and all are false, for all are compact of the same stuff as the others: a stuff bearing plainly the marks of human emotion and human construction. Now this prophet is deified, now that chief, now that other imaginary figure, half legendary or perhaps wholly without historical existence; and what is true of any one of these is true also of the Catholic scheme. The deification of its Founder is an example of deification like any other. Its elaborate theology is but a somewhat more developed specimen of what men have done before us and will do after us—a spinning of logical systems into the void on premises that are without substantial basis. Its affirmations of the miraculous are of the same legendary sort as those to be discovered in a thousand other forms; its ritual can be proved to have cousinship in this point or in that with many another ritual of sacrifice, expiation and the rest; the very details of its liturgical life, the mere ornaments, the host of practices, the great monastic institutions, the pretty small devotions of light and ornament—all these are of one material. That material has been exhaustively examined and is now historically

known. A vast mass of evidence has been accumulated and continues to accumulate. The more it is co-ordinated the more clearly this conclusion appears.

That is the position we have to meet. That is the main historical argument against the divine origin and authority of the Church of God.

Our fundamental answer to such a position is of course not historical at all. It is the answer of faith; as though a man should say, "Yes, this stone is a stone and there are multitudes of stones, but I believe this particular stone to be a talisman." Or as though he should say, "Yes, this Man was a man, and there have been countless millions of men; but this one Man, and this one Man only, was also God." The rational basis (not the positive proof) of such a reply is based upon spiritual experience—upon our judgment after noting the world, its reactions towards the Faith, and the effects of the Faith upon it, that here if anywhere is the divine; a conclusion coupled with our further judgment that somewhere there must be present upon earth the visible action of the divine acting in corporate fashion through some institution, some society, some body.

But this main argument does not concern the little essay which you are reading. I am dealing only with the value of the historical argument against the Faith, as I have put it, I think fairly, into the lips of one of our typical, modern, well-read opponents.

Now what is our reply?

Our reply is that the generalisation is hasty and inaccurate, and that the more you examine it the more you discover upon what a false and superficial basis it reposes.

There is not a great number of religions, nor has there been in the past a greater number, apparent to men of different nations and temperaments, of which hotchpotch the Catholic Church is but one. There is not a multitude of systems of theology falling under the one general category "theologies," of which the Catholic scheme is but a single specimen. Upon the contrary, there is, and has been for these centuries past, a social and religious phenomenon *unique and comparable to nothing else*, called the Catholic Church. Its spirit, quality, voice, personality is such that the line of cleavage does not lie between it and pure scepticism, leaving on the one side *all* religions (including Catholicism)

and on the other the free uncertain mind; the line of cleavage lies between the Faith upon one side and all other human opinions and moods upon the other. And this unique character of the Catholic Church is as plain an historical truth as the astronomical truth of the reverse rotation of Uranus is unique among the planets. It claims what no other society has ever claimed. It affirms its Founder to have been what no other society claims its founder to have been. It functions as no other society has functioned: by an unsupported authority, absolute in its affirmation.

It may indeed be granted that in pure theory at least there is an equal alternative to the unique thing. One might say that, outside the Catholic Church, the human mind can stand quite unattached, examining all things by no criterion save common experience and the deductive power of the intelligence. In pure theory there might be a whole society of such detached (but also quite unrooted) minds with no certitudes, no ethical predicates, living upon the void.

In practice that is not so. There is not one of us that can point to any mind of his acquaintance, or to any mind appearing through the pages of a

book which occupies such a position. All without exception betray an ethical theory of some kind, that is, doctrines which, though the holder of them may refuse to formulate them, appear in his actions. Every man is a theologian. Every man has his philosophy of the world. And viewing man thus as he is, always a member of some group, we do not discover as an historical phenomenon any group save that of the Catholic Church which possesses the unique character of authority. Conversely, we find in all other groups the well-known marks attached to men in all forms of worship—rites, doctrines, disciplines: we find in Catholicism similar phenomena; but we do *not* find in any of the other groups, into which men's attempts at satisfying this religious sense may fall, that particular mark in which Catholicism is quite different from all the rest.

Let us turn to the historical evidence on the matter and see how true this is, prefacing that examination by the reiterated remark that such unique quality does not of itself and unsupported by other considerations determine the mind to accept the authority of the Faith, but remarking that it does provide a presumption stronger than our

modern world, even its small educated part, is generally aware of.

In the first place, is it true that there are a mass of religions bearing for their chief characteristic that which is the chief characteristic of the Catholic Church—a secure, unfailing and constant affirmation of Infallible Authority?

No; it is not true. There have been many restricted, some (very few) widespread religious systems; to-day there are two in especial—the Buddhist, the Mohammedan, occur at once to mind; but not one of them makes this particular Catholic affirmation, Mohammedan society, not a new religion but essentially an offshoot and degradation of the Christian, taking the Catholic doctrine and simplifying it to its last rudiments (with the exception of all in it that demands faith in mystery), is passionate for a certain way of life and intolerant of others. It creates a very marked and special culture which no doubt could claim in its own way to be historically unique, just as the culture of the Chinese is historically unique. But Islam does not come forward with the statement, "I am a society of divine foundation possessed of the power to reply to question after question upon the only

things that really matter, to which questions man has never yet of himself attained an answer." It says indeed, "This is the way to live; and in this way of living we are content. A disturbance of it is odious to us, and we desire as much as we can to turn all others into our own image—not only the religious, but the social habits of men offend us where very different from our own." But it does not and cannot of its nature say, "Here alone through this defined organisation is the voice of God perpetually speaking, settling controversies, defining and re-defining in ever-expanding area of thought whatever truths may be challenged." It is alive, but it is not alive with a life of development; and so far from presenting any organisation through which its doctrine can be developed as well as affirmed, it is specifically repugnant to such organisations. In a phrase, Mohammedanism is essentially anti-clerical.

If it be true of Mohammedanism (the chief historically active opponent of the Faith) that it has not the peculiar marks which make the Catholic Church different from any other society in the world, that it has not some major quality by which all religions are distinct and which is also the major

quality of the Catholic Church, that statement is still more true of Buddhism.

Buddhism never pretended to make, and does not make to-day, an affirmation to be accepted corporately by the universal world. It presents a certain philosophy—which I cannot but call the philosophy of despair, and which is quite certainly a philosophy of negation. It presents this gloom for acceptation by the individual mind. But it claims no corporate rule; it affirms no divine authority: it enjoys no functional power of excretion nor any of assimilation. You cannot say of Buddhism, "Here is orthodoxy and the living tradition searching out heresy and denouncing it, maintaining its life triumphantly by insistence upon a personality of its own and by a corresponding power of attack against whatever would diminish or threaten that life."

If we turn from the great systems to the local worships we find another character, wholly separate from that apparent in Catholicism: that they do not pretend to certitude; they pretend to no more than the satisfaction of emotion and to a corporation tradition. They have their myths, but will readily accept them as myths or compare them un-

offended with the myths of others. They have their sanctities: but their sanctities make no pretence at all to be universal. There was one, and only one, historical phenomenon, which in this point did compare with the Faith—the phenomenon of the Jewish religion; and that is precisely why we Catholics call the Jewish religion the forerunner of our own and the preparation of the world for its Incarnate God.

But is it not true that there are countless ceremonies and also major doctrines, comparable to and some even nearly identical with those of the Faith?

It is; and to that we answer that if there is to be such a thing as the Faith on earth, it could not but be so. If men must worship, they will worship in places. If men feel the pull of a religious emotion, at once the sacramental idea must enter in. There cannot but be a connection between the physical life of man and any religious system whatsoever, true or false, with which he is inmixed. And so surely as the ministers of the true religion will breathe and eat and walk upon their feet, each as much as the ministers of the false, so surely you will find in a true religion, if true religion there be, habits, practices, doctrines, which (not all combined, but here

one, there another) men have groped for or arrived at in systems which attempted or adumbrated the truth, but did not even claim to be the full truth.

It is not an historical argument against the divinity of this one thing that it has the qualities which human things must have. Upon the contrary, it is an argument in favour of its claim.

That the unique object here displayed, the Catholic Church, is divine cannot on this account be affirmed; but it can be affirmed that if such a unique object exist, then it will have these characters attaching to it.

A man making a survey of what little is known of the old religious experiments and perversions of mankind, and being asked, as a pure hypothesis, "Suppose a divine society, corporate, distinct, highly organised, and therefore of highly differentiated function, were to arise on earth to bear witness to the Living God: suppose such a thing for the sake of argument only, what, think you, would such a body present by way of appearance, action and thought?" could not but answer that it would have of necessity present within it not only vital truths, but also practices discoverable wherever man had groped at or half remembered a revelation.

This man, with no knowledge of such a society, but considering what his fellow beings were, what the human mind is, what questions it poses, what answers it demands, would reply: "In that society you would discover the worship of a Creator, the affirmation that he had revealed himself; a mysterious link between the divine and the human, comparable to the link between the unthinking matter of our bodies and the living essence within. It would have sacrifice and veneration combined. It would sanctify objects, places, persons and rites; it would have central institutions, and in proportion to its vitality a multitude of lesser activities; it would have symbols which it would distinguish from realities and forms of reality which it would attach to symbols; for man without a soul is a corpse, and man without a body is a wraith. This supposed society which you bid men imagine would certainly present in their highest form such elements as History has also discovered, disjointedly appearing, often perverted, often degraded, in the various (and ineffective) spiritual experiments or lapses of mankind."

Then, one might say to such a man, such a general scholar and observer of the unique animal, man,

at prayer, "Should there conceivably be such a home upon the earth, how otherwise would you know it?" He could but answer, "Its nature would be such that it would satisfy to the full the demands of men; it would be unique so as to correspond to man himself who is unique on earth, and it would grant him fulness and repose."

Such and such alone is the Catholic Church. If it be not what it claims to be, then all is void.

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